Facilitating Professional Development of Teacher Educators Through Web Based Programmes – The Karnataka Experience

Abstract

This paper is a presentation on the web based induction programme for elementary teacher educators conducted by DSERT, Karnataka. The programme was originally planned and implemented in collaboration with RIE, Mysore. This six month course provides inputs to DIET faculty on their roles and functions. It also sets to develop clarity on various issues concerning primary education. The course contains face to face interactions, tele-interactions and interactions through email. The assignments are sent to online facilitators. The Principals of DIETs are onsite facilitators who provide facilities and support the programme. A team of online facilitators maintain the web page, edit the contents to suit the changing scenario and add new content. The programme has already completed three batches covering about 160 faculty from DIETs all over Karnataka. The response has been good. It has been found that the faculty who undergo this training do learn to use the email for communication and the web for further professional development. This web page can be used by any elementary teacher educator for professional development.

This paper describes the assumptions, objectives, processes and outcomes of this programme.

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Introduction

The roles and functions of DIET faculty have undergone a number of changes since their establishment. Two National Curriculum Frameworks, RTE 2009 have almost redefined the functioning of the entire Department of Education. On the outset it might appear that the functions remain the same. But changing perspectives of school education, socio-economic life styles, priorities of the government do influence the functioning of schools. DIETs which are meant for monitoring and supervising school education in the district have the ultimate responsibility of conceptualising the change, taking measures to implement the changes and monitor the same. This calls for constant updating of the knowledge and skill base of the faculty of DIETs so that they are able to cope with the changing demands. Professional development of teacher educators is as important as the development of teachers.

Background

There are very few programmes that target the professional development of teacher educators.   This was found to be a lacuna as early as 1997 in Karnataka, which resulted in the preparation of a training package titled "Teacher Trainer".   This 15 day face to face training proposed to equip the DIET faculty with knowledge and skills required for their effective functioning. But DSERT could organise only one programme of this kind because it was found very difficult to keep the faculty of DIETs engaged in one spot for a duration of 15 days. Their responsibilities back in DIET demanded their presence and they were not inclined to leave their workplaces for a long duration. Meanwhile the training module was also reconsidered for a shorter duration.   In between a few short one day or two day interactions on various issues were organised by the DSERT. But they were so focused on specific issues that they would not give any comprehensive understanding of DIETs. All these developments clearly pointed at two needs.

1. The need to have scope for professional development in DIETs
2. The need to organise such programmes with least disturbance to the regular functioning of DIET faculty

The recruitment and placement policy for DIET faculty in Karnataka also necessitates the establishment of a mechanism that allows them to access a support system as and when required. The faculty positions in the DIETs and CTEs of Karnataka are interchangeable with administrative posts like the secondary school HM, BRC, BEO, and the DDPI.   There is no guarantee that a member of faculty who is found in DIET in the beginning of an academic

year will continue there for the whole year. Every time some one enters the DIET fold afresh, he/she needs an induction training. Without such initiation, they would not be able to function in DIETs as per their role expectations.

It was in this context that RIE, Mysore proposed setting up of a web portal for facilitating professional development of DIET faculty through the distant mode. A six month web based induction programme was proposed.   The areas were identified, literature was developed. The web space was given by WIKI EDUCATOR.

Assumptions

The web based induction programme made several assumptions about functions of DIET faculty and getting them involved in a professional development programme.

1. The participation and involvement of DIET faculty will be better if they can be offered opportunities for professional development right at their working places.
2. The media could be fully exploited for distant mode facilitation
3. Use of web would also result in incidental learning of English language
4. The distant mode employed would provide a hands on experience in using the media for communication
5. A course spread over a period of time would create opportunities for trying out newly learnt knowledge and skills and reflect over their effectiveness thus leading on to experiential learning

Aims and Objectives

The Aim of the Programme was to create an ICT platform to help the DIET faculty in shaping up oneself continuously as a Resource Person.

The Objectives of the Programme are

- To understand DIET as an academic institution and the challenges before it

- To develop an appreciation for role of the DIET faculty as a trainer

- To locate and use ICT for enrichment and effective functioning as a DIET faculty

- To enhance functional capabilities as a DIET faculty

The Programme

Induction Programme for Elementary Teacher Educators, as it is called, consists of six major areas.

1. e-Media

2. DIET Roles and Functions
3. Trainer Skills
4. Research(Initially called Action Research)
5. Planning
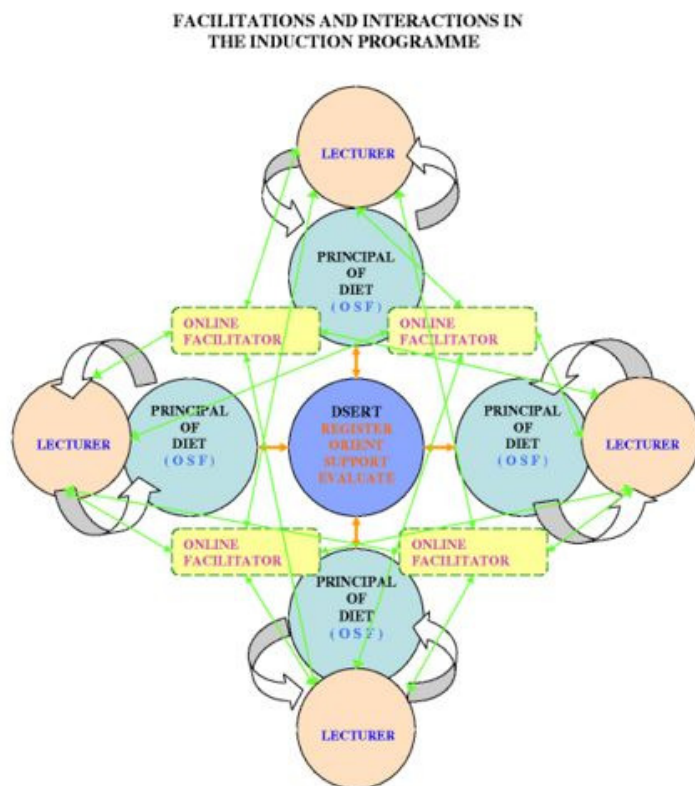6. General Issues that are of concern to DIET faculty

Each area consists of sub chapters. The contents were written by an expert committee and uploaded to the site. The assignments to be submitted were also designed and uploaded. The six areas were spread over a period of six months. The course also offered reading of books as a related assignment. A separate book shelf was also created for the use of participants. Different links were given in appropriate places. The links included audios and videos. Different sites of educational interest, departmental sites were also linked.

Some Features

The programme inputs of this web based induction programme consist of

1. Primary texts, pdf file attachments and AV clippings developed by the online facilitators
2. Pages from relevent internet sites under different sections
3. Video clippings on different topics and for different training objectives
4. All assignments are also provided under 'Self Check and Evaluation' on the main page
5. The Book Shelf has a collection of relevent material and also consists of four activities to be accomplished by the participants during the training
6. Web Resources provides with connections to internet sites which could help a particpant as a DIET faculty
7. The participants can get to know about the online facilitators and their e-mail ID by opening *online facilitators* on main page
8. At the end of every page is a **navigation help** that allows participants to go to any section of the package without having to go to the main page. They would need this help when they want to parallally refer to more than one section of the package.

For the purpose of providing support online and onsite facilitators were identified. The following diagram represents the support structure created for the implementation of this programme.

FACILITATIONS AND INTERACTIONS IN THE INDUCTION PROGRAMME

The Onsite Facilitators would provide systemic support at the institutional level and undertake monitoring. The Online Facilitators would provide continuous support on learning and monitor progress of the enrolled

The course interactions happen in three major phases.

1. Phase I - To initiate participants in the course, the use of web, creation of email, training in the use of Office tools for two or three days.
2. Phase II - Teleconferences to provide on going support - twice during the course - for a day or two depending on the need.
3. Phase III - Face to face interaction for assessment and certification

Assignments are to be submitted every month as scheduled to which online facilitators would respond.

Assessment

Three types of assessment mechanisms are used.

1. The Assignments and their timely submission
2. Summative Test at the end of the programme
3. Practicals

There is a major stress on the timely submission of assignments. The dates on which the assignments are submitted are noted. In doing so this programmes expects the participants to be on some professional development tasks on a regular basis. This can also be viewed as a habit formation exercise.   The quality of the assignments is also considered.   The summative test spreads across all the areas and basically aims at assessing how comprehensive the learning is.   The practicals include the use of Office tools, creation of files, ppts, internet browsing and the use of email.

Based on all the three assessments grades are awarded as follows.

A+ - Timely submission of assignments, quality work, deep commitment
A   - Timely submission of assignments, acceptable quality, interested
B+ - Submission of assignments done around the date fixed, acceptable
        after some correction or revision, interested
B   - Submission of assignments done around the date fixed, ideas projected
         debatable, needs more practice in using media, externally motivated
C+ - Assessment on only those submitted assignments, externally
         motivated, no good insight, no command over the use of media
C   - No involvement, assignments not submitted, no command over media

Those participants scoring A+ and exhibiting a high level of commitment are considered to be online facilitators in the coming courses. Thus the resource group keeps getting strengthened course after course. Those who get less than B are expected to reappear for the course or complete the work and submit them for consideration. Depending on the quality of work submitted, they are awarded certificates or allowed to take the final test and practicals as the case may be. However, such candidates have preferred not to attend the subsequent workshops and dropped out of the course. It has also been observed that a few of them drop out due to work pressure from the institute side. A few of the participants dropped out after they were transferred to administrative posts.

Outcomes

The following table describes the performance of participants in the last three courses. The total number of participants who have completed the course so far are 157.

A+ - 27
A - 59
B+ - 51
B - 10
C+ - nil
C - nil

The incidental outcomes which are observed by the online facilitators are worth a mention here.

1. The participants have learnt to check their mail box regularly. The information sent to them by email gets response immediately.
2. They have begun to use mobile message service to send bulk message to teachers and others especially for training purposes.
3. The mobile numbers of the participants of Teacher Empowerment Programme conducted in collaboration with the British Council were extensively used by DIET nodal officers for contacting them, giving instructions and so on.
4. Many of the participants have begun to browse the net regularly, read and forward worthwhile articles to their friends all over the state.
5. DIET faculty enter this web page for information on departmental matters, reading books linked including 'Shikshana Varthe', the newsletter of the department.

The sustainability of the effects of this training is basically due to the fact that the participants are able to relate all the inputs to their duties in DIETs. What the participants really pick up is an attitude towards the use of media and a work culture using computers and the internet. Since they find it useful, they continue to use the skills and knowledge learnt.

Challenges

The programme faces a number of problems. A few of them are listed here. These are observed by the online facilitators during the course of training.

1. In some of the DIETs, the availability of computers and internet connectivity are not up to the mark. This leads to delay in submission of assignments. The delay sometimes results in loss of interest.
2. Those who are not good at typing face it a problem to send assignments as they have to get it typed by some one else.
3. Reading serious literature in English seems to affect the performance of the participants. They prefer reading material in Kannada as they are quite well versed in Kannada.

4. The tele interactions could not be held in the last two years as there were technical problems. This resulted in more face to face trainings which was not in the original design of the programme.

However, these problems have been considered and different strategies have been worked out to over come them.

1. The participants were permitted to use the nearest browsing centre and the expenses incurred could be reimbursed to them using the contingency grants of DIETs.
2. A typing tutor was linked in the site. A few exercises were designed to help them develop typing speed. However, with more familiarity the speed never became a problem.
3. Key issues have been translated to Kannada and uploaded where appropriate for the benefit of the participants.
4. The satellite interactions have been planned for the year 2011-12. The studio and the network has been restored.

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